

Message Text

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FM AMEMBASSY MEXICO

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9523

C O N F I D E N T I A L MEXICO 236

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR/MX

SUBJ: "CLARIFICATION" OF CUBAN AMBASSADOR'S STATEMENTS

REF: MEXICO 134

1. FOLLOWING DIRECT REQUEST FROM VOA WASHINGTON, LOCAL VOA STRINGER ON JANUARY 8 MADE DIRECT APPROACH TO CUBAN AMBASSADOR LOPEZ MUINO IN ATTEMPT TO VERIFY STATEMENTS MADE DURING COURSE OF AMBASSADOR'S PRESS CONFERENCE (REFTEL). IN VOA FOLLOW-UP INTERVIEW, AMBASSADOR FLATLY DENIED STATEMENTS AS REPORTED REGARDING POSSIBILITY FOR RENEWED US-CUBAN DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS; RATHER, HE STATED THAT "THERE CAN BE NO DIALOGUE ON THIS MATTER SO LONG AS US EMBARGO CONTINUES". AMBASSADOR FURTHER DENIED HAVING EITHER DIRECTLY OR INDIRECTLY REFERRED TO GUANTANAMO BAY. (AP STORY FILED BY CORRESPONDENT NICHOLSON ATTRIBUTED TO LOPEZ MUINO STATEMENT THAT GUANTANAMO BAY IS NO LONGER AN IMPEDIMENT TO RENEWED RELATIONS).

2. DURING INCIDENTAL CONTACT IN CONTEXT OF MONTHLY DIPLOMATIC GROUP LUNCHEON JANUARY 9, CUBAN REPRESENTATIVES WERE MARKEDLY WARMER TOWARDS US PARTICIPANTS. IN PAST CUBANS STUDIOUSLY HAVE ESCHEWED ALL CONTACT IF POSSIBLE. ON JANUARY 9 THERE WERE AT LEAST TWO SEPARATE INSTANCES IN WHICH THEY ENTERED INTO RELATIVELY FRIENDLY, ALTHOUGH SOMEWHAT STIFF CONVERSATION. IN ONE OF THESE TWO CONVERSATIONS, CUBAN INTERLOCUTOR COMMENTED THAT, IN
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HIS OPINION, AMBASSADOR LOPEZ MUINO'S STATEMENTS WERE NOTHING MORE THAN A REITERATION OF POSITION ENUNCIATED BY CASTRO IN JULY

1973 (EMBASSY IS NOT AWARE OF SPECIFIC CASTRO STATEMENT TO WHICH CUBAN DIPLOMAT ALLUDED). AGAIN, THIS CUBAN REITERATED THAT LIFTING OF EMBARGO COULD, AT MAXIMUM, CLEAR WAY FOR DISCUSSION OF POSSIBLE RENEWED RELATIONS; MANY OTHER (UNSPECIFIED) ISSUES WOULD HAVE TO BE RESOLVED BEFORE SUCH A STEP COULD BE TAKEN.

3. AMERICAN CORRESPONDENT WHO ATTENDED ORIGINAL PRESS CONFERENCE TOLD INFORMATION OFFICER THAT CUBAN EMBASSY HAD CALLED THAT MEETING -- I.E. IT WAS PREPLANNED AND NOT IN RESPONSE TO REQUEST FOR INTERVIEW. SOURCE ALSO QUOTED LOPEZ MUINO AS HAVING SAID THAT, IN CONTEXT OF 5-YEAR DEVELOPMENT PLAN, "CUBA WILL ATTEMPT TO BREAK AWAY FROM ECONOMIC DEPENDENCE ON OTHER COUNTRIES". LOPEZ MUINO FURTHER CITED "OTHER COUNTRIES" TO INCLUDE UNDIFFERENTIATED SCANDANAVIAN COUNTRIES. HE DID NOT MENTION USSR IN THIS CONTEXT. FINALLY, AND CONTRADICTING LOPEZ MUINO'S BACKTRACKING WITH VOA CORRESPONDENT, THIS SOURCE CONFIRMED THAT AMBASSADOR HAD MENTIONED GUANTANAMO AMONG LONG-STANDING PROBLEMS, BUT NOTED THAT SUCH DIFFERENCES ARE NOT OBSTACLES TO RENEWED DIALOGUE.

4. COMMENT: BASED ON INFORMATION CURRENTLY AVAILABLE, EMBASSY DOES NOT BELIEVE THAT AMBASSADOR LOPEZ MUINO WAS "SIGNALLING" ANY CHANGE IN CUBAN POLICY TOWARDS US. RATHER, IT APPEARS THAT HE WAS DRAWN INTO MAKING STATEMENTS THROUGH QUESTIONS POSED BY JOURNALISTS -- STATEMENTS WHICH HE MIGHT NOW REGRET HAVING MADE. EMBASSY HAS RECEIVED AT LEAST ONE UNSUBSTANTIATED REPORT TO EFFECT THAT LOPEZ MUINO HAS COME UNDER SOME FIRE FROM HIS OWN GOVERNMENT. MCBRIDE

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